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New York

President:	Mr. Alzate	(Colombia)
Members:	Azerbaijan	Mrs. Jafarova
	China	Mr. Zhang Changwei
	France	Ms. Legendre
	Germany	Mr. Selle
	Guatemala	Ms. Bolaños Pérez
	India	Mr. Vinay Kumar
	Morocco	Mr. El Mkhantar
	Pakistan	Mr. Munir
	Portugal	Ms. Teixeira Coelho
	Russian Federation	Mrs. Evstigneeva
	South Africa	Mr. Crowley
	Togo	Mr. Akpoto Komlagan
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rhodes
	United States of America	Mr. Grant

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.35 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mrs. Ribeiro Viotti (Brazil): I thank you, Mr. President, for having organized this open debate. I also thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his briefing.

These are particularly difficult and challenging times. While the international community still faces unfulfilled mandates in the Middle East, new demands unfold. Renewed and strengthened commitment to diplomacy is required of the Council.

We follow with distress and extreme concern the escalation of the crisis in Syria. We are deeply worried over the difficulties the Council has encountered in sending a unified message in response to the latest developments. An urgent ceasefire is imperative and requires determined support for Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan, his six-point plan and the Final Communiqué of the Action Group for Syria (S/2012/522, annex). The Council must work harder to discharge its responsibilities in that regard. Brazil supports the approach taken by the Action Group and strongly encourages the Security Council to endorse the Communiqué.

Mr. Annan's efforts towards a negotiated solution and a Syrian-led political transition continue to be supported by the international community. They are the best, if not the only chance to avoid further descent into a spiral of destruction that will only bring greater suffering to the Syrian population, generate increasing flows of refugees and risk affecting the whole region, with unpredictable consequences for the Middle East and international peace and security.

Unfortunately, as the International Committee of the Red Cross has indicated, we are facing dire symptoms and consequences of what can now be characterized as a non-international armed conflict. All of the parties must fulfil their obligations to halt the violence, but the primary responsibility in that regard lies with the Government of Syria. We also repudiate terrorist attacks against the civilian infrastructure.

The extension of the United Nations monitoring mission for 30 days is welcome. We must ensure that it contributes to changing the dynamic on the ground in a way that brings the parties urgently to the negotiating table. Eleven Brazilian observers have served with the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria for the past three months. Their work has unfortunately been limited by a lack of minimum security conditions. We reiterate that all parties must ensure the observers' safety and freedom of movement and cooperate with the Mission.

With great concern, we took note of recent declarations concerning chemical weapons that directly contradicted long-established international norms and basic principles enshrined not only in the Chemical Weapons Convention, but also in the 1925 Geneva Protocol, to which Syria has been party since 1968.

We have yet to see meaningful developments in the long-stalled peace process between Israel and Palestine. We regret that recent attempts to revamp direct negotiations did not bear fruit. The paralysis of the peace process has pushed the question of Israeli settlements even further to the fore. Settlements are illegal under international law, contrary to peace, detrimental to Israel's own security concerns and a threat to the two-State solution. We are troubled by attempts to affirm the legality of settlements and outposts. They support a logic that runs counter to the two-State solution and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

In the face of those actions, recognition of the Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders and its admission as a Member of the Organization are fully warranted, as President Dilma Rousseff recalled before the General Assembly in September 2011 (see A/66/PV.11).

We should be supportive of an enhanced role for the Council in the Middle East peace process. The Council should exercise its responsibilities and renew efforts to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian question, which is undeniably one of the main challenges on the international peace and security agenda today. It should be regularly reported to by the Quartet and have the necessary elements to evaluate progress or the lack thereof. In the absence of progress, the Council should fulfil its role by providing guidance.

We believe that the support of other actors could contribute to the urgent resumption of negotiations. A renewed, collective effort towards changing the dynamics and overcoming political inertia should be

seriously considered. Peace will not be served by an inoperative Quartet and a silent Security Council.

We commend the Egyptian people for having realized free and fair elections that will further consolidate Egypt's peaceful path towards democracy. Brazil also welcomes the holding of legislative elections in Libya with broad popular participation, and congratulates the people and Government of Libya on that important step forward in its democratic transition process. We likewise acknowledge the positive developments in Tunisia, where vibrant public debates about the country's future have been taking place in a democratic environment. Brazil also commends the Government of Lebanon for reconvening its national dialogue in such challenging times. The importance of stability and progress in Lebanon today can hardly be overstressed.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Apakan (Turkey): The Israeli-Palestinian dispute continues to imperil prospects for peace and stability in the Middle East. At a time when we need a spirit of reconciliation and political resolve, Israel's practices in the occupied Palestinian territory are undermining the two-State solution and the established parameters for a just and durable peace. That situation is neither viable nor acceptable.

The settlement activities of Israel continue unabated. With unprecedented indifference, Israel not only persists in its illegal practices, but also attempts to legitimize them. The report issued by the former Israeli Supreme Court Justice Edmond Levy is yet another example. The Israeli actions unfortunately defy all moral value systems. The recent news about the intention of the Israeli Ministry of Defence to demolish eight Palestinian villages in the South Hebron Hills, to use the territory as a military exercise area and to resettle its inhabitants elsewhere is also worrisome.

Turkey supports the rightful aspirations of the Palestinian people to internationally recognized statehood. The Palestinians should be able to exercise their rights in accordance with United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. Turkey thus welcomes the Palestinian application for membership to the United Nations, submitted by President Mahmoud Abbas on 23 September 2011 (S/2011/592, annex I), and praises the Palestinian reconciliation efforts fostered by Egypt. A united Palestinian front will draw wider support from the international community.

Turkey also respects the right of all peoples to live in peace and security and rejects the use of force and means of terror. In that context, we condemn the suicide bombing targeting Israeli tourists in Bulgaria on 18 July.

The illegal blockade on Gaza is now in its sixth year. The grave situation in housing, health care and other primary services in Gaza is, no doubt, an embarrassment to the international community, but responsibility lies first and foremost with its perpetrator.

Let me quote the statistics of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which may help to visualize the level of suffering in Gaza. Eighty per cent of people in Gaza are aid recipients. Forty-four per cent of them are food insecure. Seventy-one thousand new housing units are required to meet urgent demand. There are electricity outages for up to 12 hours a day. More than 90 per cent of the Gaza aquifer is unsafe for human consumption. Such collective punishment should come to an end without further delay. Israel has yet to shoulder its responsibilities regarding the attack on the civilian humanitarian aid convoy in high seas, which resulted in the death of nine civilians.

Before I conclude my statement, I would also like to mention the situation in Syria. With the continuous assaults by Government forces, the number of casualties reportedly only last week exceeded 1,200, which was the highest since the beginning of the crisis. The total number of deaths has reached more than 19,000. We are deeply concerned about the reports that the Government of Syria is using fighter jets to attack population centres.

As the number of Syrians seeking shelter in Turkey exceeds 40,000, Turkey will continue to support the people of Syria at this dire time. We once again call for an end to the violence in Syria and for the implementation of the six-point plan of the Special Envoy to Syria, Mr. Kofi Annan, with immediate effect. As the shooting down of the Turkish military aircraft in international airspace showed, the crisis in Syria increasingly poses a threat to regional peace and security.

The socio-political transformation in the Middle East, triggered by the rightful aspirations of its peoples to a better life, exposes us to a volatile situation,

in which strong commitment to the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law are essential. Such principles also apply to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are threatened. Thus, while welcoming the efforts of the Secretary-General and Special Coordinator Serry, we call on the international community to give its decisive support to a just and lasting solution based on international recognition of Palestine, with the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem at its capital and living side by side in peace with Israel.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this debate and I thank Special Coordinator Robert Serry for his report.

I would first like to join others in expressing Australia's strong condemnation of the appalling bombing in Bulgaria on 18 July. As we know, such terrorist attacks are not acceptable under any circumstances, and we express our condolences to the people of Israel and Bulgaria.

Like many countries, Australia is greatly concerned about the current standstill in the Middle East peace process. The world has repeatedly called for a two-State solution, which allows for a secure Israel and a viable and independent Palestinian State living side by side. But the mere repetition of that essential goal, which remains the only credible solution to the conflict, will not achieve results on the ground.

The year 2012 has seen some modest progress towards negotiations, led first by Jordan's King Al Hussein and Foreign Minister Judeh, and then by the parties themselves, through an exchange of letters between President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu. However, those encouraging signs have not been followed by what is the only path to realizing a just solution to the conflict, namely, an immediate resumption of direct negotiations on the basis of the 1967 boundaries, with agreed land swaps.

To achieve that, both sides must refrain from actions that are damaging to the peace process. In particular — and as nearly all who participate in these debates, including Australia, have consistently said — the expansion of Israeli settlements must end. Australia is also especially concerned that all violence against civilians, including rocket attacks from Gaza that target Israeli civilians, must cease immediately.

We must also continue to support Palestinian efforts to build their institutions and to enhance their governance capacity. The progress made in that area must not be wound back. To that end, my own country signed a five-year multi- million-dollar partnership agreement with the Palestinian Authority as a means of promoting a degree of certainty to Palestinian finances. In May, we signed an Australian $90-million multi-year partnership with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). UNRWA's focus on education and health-care programmes, in particular, is a vital investment in the human capital essential to building a successful Palestinian State. The final realization of the two-State solution is in the long-term interest of both parties in that it enables the Palestinians to achieve their inalienable right to self-determination and provides for Israel's long-term security.

The terrible and worsening situation in Syria is, obviously, of grave concern to us all. The violence has moved to a new level of brutality. It is Syrian civilians, including women and children, who have borne the brunt of that violence and who must remain at the forefront of our collective efforts to find a peaceful solution.

Like others, Australia was greatly disappointed by the Council's failure to adopt a Chapter VII resolution, which would have fulfilled the call of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States to Syria, Mr. Kofi Annan, to ensure that there were real consequences for non-compliance with resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012). It is incumbent on all of us not to protect a brutal regime that has lost all legitimacy. President Al-Assad must reverse course, must live up to his obligations under Mr. Annan's peace plan, and must end the violence immediately, including the use of heavy weapons against civilians.

The humanitarian dimension of the conflict looms particularly large, including for the hundreds of thousands who have been displaced. The regional implications of this conflict are serious, and we acknowledge the heavy burden borne by Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan in providing assistance. To help alleviate this burden, we will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to agencies and non-governmental organizations.

To conclude, we have seen elsewhere in the region — including, most recently, in Libya — that the most effective means for balancing the competing interests inherent in any society is the establishment of fair and inclusive democratic processes that enable all

citizens and groups to give voice to their views and to select a Government that can represent them. Similarly, our collective efforts on Syria must be directed towards an immediate end to violence and the realization of a political solution that meets the legitimate aspirations of all of Syria's citizens.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): I thank you, Sir, for convening this timely open debate. Before I continue, I wish to express the appreciation of my delegation to Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing on this important issue.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and with the statement to be delivered later by the representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The absence of progress in the peace process between Israel and Palestine has been a matter of utmost concern to my delegation. Efforts to help resume dialogue and substantive negotiations between the two parties have been made to no avail. Indeed, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, as asserted by the Secretary-General at the Asia-Pacific Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace held in Bangkok recently, has been at a dangerous standstill for some time.

Like many other members of the international community, my delegation is very clear on one thing — the issue of settlements is the most potent obstacle to the prospects of peace in the Middle East, with particular reference to the two-State solution. This does not mean that we do not consider the other final status issues, such as borders, security, refugees and the status of Jerusalem, to be important.

Without doubt, each of these issues is significant, but the challenge of settlements has emerged as the key puzzle. Regrettably, it is also one that is now continuously manipulated by Israel. Thus, each time there seems to be a prospect for progress of any kind, a sudden twist emerges — such as settler violence and extremism; the eviction of Palestinians and the demolition of their homes; or some kind of new acceleration in settlement construction and expansion — which then beats back that effort or hope. Only two years ago, Israel's manipulation of the settlement question resulted in the collapse of the proximity talks sponsored by the United States, following its failure to extend the moratorium on settlement construction.

It must also be remembered that, along with the settlement policy, Israel has also continued the illegal construction of the separation wall in the West Bank, in clear defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Similarly, following the Israeli military assault on Gaza a couple of years ago, Israel has maintained its blockade on the territory, making recovery almost impossible. Therefore, unless Israel resolves its settlement policy and halts the evictions of Palestinians, the demolition of their property and the expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, it will be impossible to conceive of any progress towards peace negotiations.

It is in consideration of this that my delegation reiterates that Israel must fully abide by the resolutions of the Council in respect of settlements. We call on Israel to dismantle the settlements it has built in violation of those resolutions, and place a complete freeze on all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. There is no other approach that can give the Palestinians and the international community the confidence that Israel is serious when it speaks about peace or the resolution of the conflict. It remains Indonesia's view and commitment that the conflict between Israel and Palestine must be resolved through the two-State solution, but that cannot be done if Israel sponsors a settlement menace that frustrates every effort and imperils every hope.

Furthermore, we would like to reiterate that we remain committed to the two-State solution of Israel and a viable and independent Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the principle of land for peace and a just and comprehensive regional peace consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the road map of the Quartet, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The two-State solution, however, will be meaningful only if it is comprehensive and embraces other relevant political tracks, such as the Israel-Syria and Israel-Lebanon tracks. Thus, Israel must withdraw completely from the remaining occupied Lebanese land, as well as from the occupied Syrian Golan, and comply fully with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Finally, we call on members of the international community not to relent in their support of the cause of Palestinian statehood on the basis of the 1967 borders,

with East Jerusalem as its capital. Only that outcome can be the basis of a just solution to all other aspects of the question of Palestine in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions.

To conclude, allow me to address the dire situation in Syria. In that regard, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has underlined that "the responsibility to put an end to this situation is in the hands not only of the Syrian people and Government, but also of the international community". Therefore, Indonesia sincerely hopes that the world, including the Security Council, will now be united in ending the violence in Syria.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): In line with the time limit, I shall deliver a condensed version of my statement, while the full text will be circulated in the Chamber.

I wish to thank Mr. Robert Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his briefing. Malaysia also wishes to associate itself with the statement made by the representative Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and that to be delivered later by the representative of Kazakhstan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The situation in the Middle East and North Africa has shown some encouraging signs of stability, with the political aspirations of the region's peoples manifesting themselves in political reality. We continue to witness democratic processes and the participation of people in politics and political institutions is promising. Malaysia would like to highlight these positive developments as the appearance of normalcy and recovery has attracted the interest of many countries across the globe, including in the Council.

Malaysia welcomes the recent political developments in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia, which have held elections in recent months. Malaysia believes that the transition to democratic processes in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia has shown that the people are at the forefront of political developments and will undoubtedly contribute to regional peace and stability.

While the situation in those countries has improved, the same cannot be said for what we are witnessing in Syria. The violence that we have witnessed over the past months has left thousands of civilians maimed and dead, despite the six-point plan and presence of United Nations observers.

Malaysia is appalled by the civilian losses in Syria. Malaysia calls for all parties to the conflict to cease their violent activities immediately. Malaysia believes that the Syrian Government and opposition should commit themselves fully to the six-point plan, which would contribute to peace in the country. We further call on the international community, the Syrian Government and all other parties to work together to find an amicable solution for the people of Syria.

The question of Palestine and the Middle East cannot be separated, nor be overlooked or ignored. In order to achieve peace in the Middle East, the plight of the Palestinian people should be resolved with international determination. The suffering of the Palestinians and the predicament of its people are currently the longest global tragedy of modern times. The solution has always been in sight, but it has been almost 20 years since the Oslo Agreement, which was endorsed by the two sides but never took off. Additionally, the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 also never materialized. The long-standing two-State solution remains a vision, but nothing more. Peace in the Middle East once seemed so close, and yet today that solution is as far off as when it was first envisaged.

The continued occupation by Israel of Palestinian land and territory are as unlawful today as it was in 1967. Israel's continued occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory has stood as a sustained violation to international humanitarian and human rights law. The regime has displaced thousands of Palestinian people and killed innocent civilians. In short, Israel has failed in its obligation as an occupying Power to protect civilians, instead committing extrajudicial killings and oppression. The regime has continued along that degrading trajectory with impunity. Its persistent blockade of the Gaza Strip has further translated into misery for more than 1.6 million Palestinian people.

I have just returned from Gaza, where I was on a United Nations mission under the auspices of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Territories Occupied since 1967. While in Gaza, we had the opportunity to observe the actual situation on the ground and to meet directly with witnesses and victims affected by Israel's blockade. The blockade continues to have a devastating impact on the people of Gaza.

The principal result of Israel's blockade has been to make 80 per cent of the Palestinians in Gaza dependent upon international humanitarian aid. I have to admire the resilience of Gazans for being able to survive on so little, especially in the face of the inadequate health care, frequent power outages and not infrequent incidents of violence that mark their daily lives. The blockade on Gaza is illegal. It amounts to the collective punishment of 1.6 million Palestinians. The international community must bring pressure to bear on Israel until it is fully lifted.

The mass imprisonment of Palestinians, the routine demolition of homes and the displacement of Palestinians, the widespread violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, and the blockade and resulting reliance upon illegal smuggling to survive are practices that amount to a strategy to either force the Palestinian people off their land or so severely marginalize them as to establish and maintain a system of permanent oppression.

Those Israeli practices are systematic. They are aimed at moving Palestinians off their land. Working together, they increasingly discredit Israel's claim of a commitment to two states living side by side in peace and security.

Malaysia calls for the immediate cessation of Israeli military activity and the withdrawal from all occupied territory, including East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, to the 1967 borders. Malaysia also calls for an immediate stop to the annexation of Palestinian lands through Israeli settler activities, as well as for Israel to rightly return those lands to people of Palestine.

Malaysia shall continue to support the aspirations of the Palestinian people for self-determination and for the return of their inalienable rights. We shall also continue to support the two-State solution so that it achieves the intended outcome, namely, the establishment of the State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the State of Israel, both living in peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Mayr-Harting: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The acceding country Croatia; the candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

Let me begin by thanking the Special Coordinator for the briefing he provided to the Council today.

The European Union strongly condemns the deadly terrorist attack on a bus carrying Israeli citizens that took place in Bulgaria on 18 July. Those responsible for that horrible and barbaric act of terrorism, which claimed the lives of Israeli and Bulgarian civilians, should be prosecuted and brought to justice. The European Union expresses its solidarity with the Bulgarian and Israeli people and its deepest sympathy with the families of the victims and all affected as a consequence of that appalling act of violence. The European Union reiterates its strong and unequivocal condemnation of all forms and acts of terrorism, irrespective of origin, cause or motive, as well as its unwavering commitment to the fight against terrorism.

The European Union remains deeply concerned by the deteriorating situation in Syria. The European Union strongly condemns the ever increasing use of force by the regime, including the use of heavy artillery and shelling against populated areas, in blatant violation of its obligations under the Annan plan and resolutions 2042 (2012) and 2043 (2012). It is appalled by the horrific killings in the village of Tremseh on 12 July. The Union calls for an immediate international independent investigation. The EU urges the Syrian regime to end immediately the killing of civilians, withdraw the Syrian army from besieged towns and cities and allow for a peaceful transition, for the sake of the country.

International humanitarian law must be respected by all. The European Union is deeply concerned about the recent intensification of violence, including in Damascus, which demonstrates the urgent need for a political transition that meets the democratic aspirations of the Syrian people and bring back stability in Syria. The European Union remains committed to the sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity of Syria.

The EU recalls its full support for Joint United Nations-League of Arab States Special Envoy Kofi Annan's mission and for his six point plan, which must be implemented. It welcomes the outcome of the Action

Group meeting held in Geneva on 30 June, in particular the call for the establishment of a transitional governing body with full executive powers made up of opposition and Government representatives and formed by mutual consent. The EU encourages Kofi Annan to continue working on the implementation of that transition plan and urges all parties to support those efforts.

The European Union deeply regrets that the Security Council was not able to agree to a draft resolution that would have endorsed the communiqué of the Action Group and foreseen measures to enforce compliance with the Annan plan under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations. The EU regrets that the Council has thus failed to uphold its responsibilities and to back the Joint Special Envoy's efforts. The European Union calls for united action by all members of the Security Council, including Russia and China, to add more robust and effective pressure and ensure that there will be serious consequences for continued non-compliance with the Council's previous decisions.

The European Union welcomes the decision to renew the mandate of the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria for a final period of 30 days, taking into account the Secretary-General's recommendations to reconfigure the Mission as well as the operational implications of the increasingly dangerous security situation in Syria. The EU recalls that the Syrian authorities are responsible for ensuring the security and safety of the Mission. The European Union is ready to provide the needed support to guarantee the success of the Supervision Mission.

The European Union welcomes the national pact and the common political vision for the transition in Syria issued following the Syrian opposition conference held under the auspices of the Arab League in Cairo on 2 and 3 July, and encourages all groups to continue engaging in that process. The European Union continues to urge all opposition groups to put aside their differences and to agree on a set of shared principles and start working towards an inclusive, orderly and peaceful transition in Syria. The European Union urges all opposition groups to continue to support Mr. Annan's efforts and to be ready to provide leadership and to engage with the transition plan designed by the Action Group for Syria on 30 June. All Syrians must have a place in the new Syria and enjoy equal rights, regardless of their origin, affiliations, religion, beliefs or gender.

On Monday, the European Union agreed on measures to strengthen the enforcement of its arms embargo. It will continue to urge the international community to join its efforts by taking steps to apply and enforce restrictive measures on the Syrian regime and its supporters.

With respect to the Middle East peace process, our objective remains the same. Changes across the Arab world point to the urgent need for progress. The resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is of strategic importance to the entire region and beyond. The European Union is convinced that heeding the aspirations of the people of the region, including those of Palestinians to statehood and those of Israelis to security, is a crucial element for lasting peace, stability and prosperity in the region. It is in the fundamental interest of the European Union, of the parties and of the wider region to resolve the conflict, which can be achieved through a comprehensive peace agreement based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Road Map, the agreements previously reached by the parties, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The European Union stresses once again the central role of the Quartet in that context, and has redoubled its efforts with Quartet partners to facilitate contacts between the parties in order to resume direct and substantive negotiations. Our position is clear — negotiations are the best way forward. The European Union reiterates its call on the parties to demonstrate their commitment to a peaceful solution by taking actions that can create the environment of trust required to ensure meaningful negotiations leading to a comprehensive and lasting peace. The European Union will continue contributing, including within the Quartet, to a negotiated solution.

The European Union remains unequivocally committed to the security of Israel, including with regard to vital threats in the region. The European Union is appalled by recurring rocket attacks from Gaza and condemns in the strongest terms violence deliberately targeting civilians. The European Union also recalls its commitment towards Israel's full integration in the region.

The viability of a two-State solution must be maintained. The European Union expresses great concern about developments on the ground, which threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. Those include the marked acceleration of settlement construction, which remains illegal under international law, ongoing evictions and house demolitions in East

Jerusalem, serious limitations on the Palestinian Authority's ability to promote the development of Palestinian communities in Area C, and the Palestinian Authority's current financial difficulties.

At the Foreign Affairs Council in May, European Union Foreign Ministers expressed a clear and strong position on these issues, forging a common European Union approach to developments on the ground. They reiterated that a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. The EU also recalled the applicability of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War.

On the humanitarian front, the most pressing situation is in Gaza. The EU recalls that the situation in the Gaza Strip will be unsustainable as long as it remains politically separated from the West Bank. While fully recognizing Israel's legitimate security needs, the EU urges Israel to take further meaningful and far-reaching steps allowing for the reconstruction and recovery of the Gaza Strip. On this occasion, the European Union underlines its strong support for the work of all relevant United Nations agencies working across the occupied Palestinian territory, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The European Union continues to call for intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas, in line with the principles set out in his speech of 4 May 2011, as an important element for the unity of a future Palestinian State and for reaching a two-State solution. The European Union looks forward to the holding of elections as an important contribution to Palestinian State-building.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Tilegen (Kazakhstan): I have the honour to address the Security Council on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) group in New York.

Our open debate today comes at a time when the situation in the Middle East, and the occupied Palestinian territory in particular, is becoming increasingly unstable. Israel's military occupation of Arab lands, its flagrant violations of international law and its denial of the national rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people remain major causes of unrest in the region and pose a serious challenge for this body.

The OIC group affirms that the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East requires firm and prompt action by the Security Council to ensure the full compliance of Israel, the occupying Power, with its legal obligations and commitments, and to end its military occupation. At the same time, the international community has a special responsibility to assist the Palestinian people in realizing their national rights to self-determination, sovereignty and independent statehood in the territory occupied by Israel since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as to help find a just solution for the plight of Palestinian refugees, in line with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

Prospects for peace and justice in the region are challenged by Israel's colonial and discriminatory policies in Arab-occupied lands. Israel, the occupying Power, continues to illegally build settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, construct the apartheid wall, restrict Palestinians' access to places of worship, escalate acts of violence by fanatic settlers against civilian Palestinians, deny the free movement of people and goods, and confiscate Palestinian homes and lands. Such violations of international law have become a daily practice that systematically undermines prospects for the two-State solution and destabilizes the region.

Similarly, Israeli illegal practices in East Jerusalem — including settlement construction, excavations underneath the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the depopulation of East Jerusalem of its indigenous Palestinian citizens, the illegal confiscation of Palestinian properties, the isolation of East Jerusalem from its Palestinian environs and the alteration of its demographic fabric and character — have reached alarming rates. These illegal Israeli practices are flagrant violations of international law and pose a challenge to the international community.

The OIC group reaffirms the centrality of the cause of Palestine for the entire Islamic world, and stresses the Palestinian, Arab and Islamic character of occupied East Jerusalem, as well as the need to fully respect the sanctity of Islamic and Christian holy places therein. The OIC group also reaffirms that East Jerusalem remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, and that its illegal annexation by

Israel continues to be rejected and unrecognized by the international community.

Muslims will never tolerate Israel's aggressions against the Al-Aqsa Mosque, one of the most sacred Islamic sites. Israel's continuing acts of aggression against Muslim and Christian holy sites in East Jerusalem could have serious repercussions on regional and international peace and security. The United Nations therefore has a special responsibility to pressure Israel to put an end to those aggressions and to respect international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We wish to affirm that an international consensus to achieve a just and comprehensive solution to the Middle East conflict requires the enforcement of international law and the implementation of international legal resolutions. At this important juncture, acknowledging and fully supporting Palestinian State-building efforts, meeting our obligations and maintaining our political will and financial commitments to the Palestinian Authority are therefore of special significance.

I wish to reaffirm the full support and solidarity of the OIC with the Palestinian people in their endeavour to regain their legitimate and inalienable national rights, including the rights of return, self-determination and the establishment of the independent Palestinian State on their national soil, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am making this statement on behalf of the group of Arab States, which endorses the statements delivered by the representative of Egypt, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and the representative of the Republic of Kazakhstan, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

I would like to offer you, Mr. President, our sincere congratulations on your friendly country's assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of July and to thank you for your tireless work during your presidency.

The topic of this meeting, the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, is not a new item on the Security Council's agenda. This issue has been with the United Nations since its founding. When we consider the issues of occupation and colonialism in the world, which the Organization has discussed for many years and in many cases has successfully resolved, we cannot help but wonder about the inability of the Council and the wider international community to find a solution to the question of Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. Hope for finding a resolution is starting to dwindle and has gone through many ups and downs over the past 60 years. Whenever a ray of hope appears on the horizon, it is quickly extinguished by Israel's intransigence and refusal to abide by the will of the international community. The human conscience demands that a solution to the Palestinian question be found, calling on the political will of the entire international community to take the most courageous steps towards that goal.

My first point concerns the stalled negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which have always been and remain the result of Israel's continued and accelerating settlement activities, especially its Judaization of Holy Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. According to Israeli media reports, on 14 July Israel decided to construct 130 new housing units in the Har Homa settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim on the road leading south-east from occupied Jerusalem to Bethlehem. This is part of a wider plan, endorsed by Israeli authorities, to build over 1,000 housing units in Jerusalem and Ramallah in the heart of the West Bank. The continued settlement activity undermines the peace process, destroys the two-State solution and remains the main obstacle to any just solution.

The position of the international community and the Council on the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories is clear. However, it needs a strong international political mechanism to implement it, because the settlements clearly violate the Fourth Geneva Convention, which considers Israel an occupying State that may not alter the demographic character of the area it occupies or confiscate occupied territories. Moreover, the sixth paragraph of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention states that "[t]he Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies".

Israel has not only ignored that article, but has violated it by providing political and economic incentives to its residents to move to and live in the occupied Palestinian territories, thereby changing their geographic and demographic nature. The establishment of the settlements has imposed limitations on the daily lives of Palestinians in the occupied territories and has left no reasonable room for the long-awaited establishment of a Palestinian State.

The second issue which is of equal importance is the situation of Holy Jerusalem, the first of the two prayer points and the third holiest shrine for more than 1.5 billion Muslims throughout the world. The Israeli occupation authorities continue to confiscate land and demolish the homes of Jerusalemites in order to change the human nature of the holy city. Israel also continues to build settlements around the city on the lands of Palestinian citizens. The occupying Power continually transfers Israeli settlers to East Jerusalem, forcefully displacing Palestinian families from their homes and cancelling their residency permits.

In the past, we have spoken in the Council about Israeli excavation activities around the Al-Aqsa Mosque. However, the past 10 years have witnessed unprecedented excavation activity in the area directly attached to the Mosque, including the Arab village of Silwan, which was annexed by Israel along with the holy city of Jerusalem. According to the Centre for Jerusalem Studies, which is part of Bar-Ilan University in Israel, the recent activities undertaken by the Israeli authorities are considered to be the largest excavation operation ever beneath the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and its vicinity. All of these actions are illegitimate and illegal, according to the resolutions on Jerusalem adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The third issue that I would like to address — following the eighth anniversary of the adoption of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004 on the illegitimacy of the construction of the wall in the occupied territories — is that of the racist separation wall built by Israel, the occupying Power. The wall breaks the West Bank into small and isolated pockets in a manner that deprives the Palestinian people of their land and water resources.

The deteriorating situation in the occupied Palestinian territories at the very least requires the Security Council to dispatch a mission to Palestine. In the past, the Security Council has visited many areas throughout the world, such as Sierra Leone, Haiti and most recently Liberia, in order to observe the situation there first-hand. We therefore call on the Security Council to make such a visit, out of moral and humanitarian motives and on the basis of its mandate to maintain international peace and security. We also call on Council members to respond to the invitation that has been sent to them from the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, *in that regard.*

In closing, I cannot fail to mention the seriously deteriorating situation in the Syrian Arab Republic. We all know of the recent increased intensity of killing, whose victims now exceed 17,000. Syria has also witnessed an increased flow of refugees escaping the hell of fighting to neighbouring countries. Their numbers now exceed 200,000 refugees, not to mention internally displaced persons. The most recent victims fell in the Al-Hula massacre of 25 May and the Trimseh massacre of 13 July, in which over 250 civilians were killed, not to mention the daily acts of killing in which tens if not hundreds die as a result of these clashes.

All of that leaves no room for doubt that the Syrian regime is relentlessly killing any Syrian who opposes it. What encourages the regime to persist in killing its people is the inability of the Council and the international community to take any firm measure to stop it, most recently when the Council failed to adopt a draft resolution pertaining to Syria last week.

It appears that those who support the regime in its criminal actions do not understand the dangers of their support and its consequences in terms of human tragedy, which will be remembered for all time. The Syrian regime would not have killed or displaced those thousands of people if it had not enjoyed the support and backing of influential international Powers.

The Arab States have taken a clear and firm position on the situation in Syria. They have urged the Syrian regime to abandon the security option and to adopt the political option, pursuant to the resolutions of the League of Arab States that formed the basis of the mandate given to Mr. Kofi Annan, Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. On that basis, and in view of the Security Council's inability to take the necessary measures incumbent upon it by virtue of its mandate and responsibilities, the Arab States have decided to appeal to the General Assembly to uphold its responsibilities in such situations, pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): The escalation of violence in Syria and the failure of the parties to implement the Annan peace plan are of grave concern. We were extremely disappointed by the use of the veto last week (see S/PV.6810) and strongly urge the Council to continue its deliberations with a view to

reaching consensus on how best to prevent further conflict in Syria, while at the same time taking steps towards permanent peace. Those steps must address the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the Syrian people without regard to ethnicity, religion or gender. Ceasefire must be a priority and all violence aimed at civilians must be put to an end immediately by all parties. If nothing is done, there may be very far-reaching repercussions, not only for the Syrian people, but for the whole region.

The number of refugees and internally displaced persons is increasing. This includes Palestinian refugees. Syria is host to almost half a million Palestinian refugees who are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which will have growing needs for assistance should the conflict continue to deteriorate.

That leads me to the question of Palestine, with the Israeli/Palestinian conflict continuing to be the core issue for peace and security in the Middle East. The situation in Palestine is unfortunately not receiving much international attention at the moment, including on the part of the Security Council. The situation is, however, far from static. It would be unwise to assume that it can be put on the back burner much longer, with developments on the ground continuing to systematically cement the occupation and seriously undermine the two-State solution.

Continued and accelerated settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, remain the main obstacle to peace. The settlements are illegal and in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. According to the Convention, all parties are obliged to ensure respect for the Convention. As a party to the Convention, Iceland calls upon Israel to adhere to its obligations and stop all settlement activities. Iceland also urges Israel to cooperate with the fact-finding team recently appointed by the Human Rights Council in Geneva to investigate the implications of the settlements for the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory.

We would like to reiterate our encouragement to the members of the Security Council to accept the invitation to visit the occupied Palestinian territory at their earliest convenience. Such a visit would demonstrate goodwill on behalf of the Council and give Council members the necessary insight to assist them in addressing this long-standing problem.

At the moment, all avenues continue to seem closed to the Palestinians, and that in itself is very serious. There is a need for a breakthrough and, under the current circumstances, that breakthrough has to come from the international community. There are plenty of avenues to be explored. In particular, the international community could send a clear message on the illegality of the settlement activities and demand their immediate halt. It could also demand the immediate lifting of the blockade on Gaza, which in itself is a collective punishment and which reached its fifth anniversary in June.

The Palestinians continue to look to the United Nations, especially to the Security Council, to help them realize their right to self-determination. The Security Council should renew its commitment to settling the conflict and inform the rest of the membership of the United Nations on how it intends to proceed.

Iceland fully supports the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and reiterates its call on the Security Council to recommend to the General Assembly that Palestine be accepted as the 194th State Member of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): As we come together in today's open debate, my delegation once again would like to express its conviction regarding the need and importance of continuing to support all actions that could lead to the establishment of justice, peace and stability and an end to violence in the Middle East.

The Middle East region is witnessing a widespread transformational thunderstorm that struck across the region. The region is currently witnessing drastic changes and people are aspiring to democracy and opposing dictators, supported by some Powers in the West. At the same time, the situation in the Middle East is growing ever more complex. There are more and more threats of terrorism, extremism and foreign intervention, which are all impediments to the growth, development and stability of the region. In this situation, any miscalculation, poor decision-making or fueling of the fire will affect the whole region and harm many people, as well as all stakeholders. For that reason, one cannot overstate the risks of overemphasizing one situation and closing one's eyes to another, similar situation. That is too risky when, in a given situation,

there is a deliberate attempt to change the realities on the ground through force, armed conflict and creating a fait accompli.

It is clear that there has been an inexorable radicalization of approaches that could lead to an ever-growing spiral of violence. For the Middle East, there are still many pieces of the puzzle to be put together in order to gain a clear and comprehensive picture of it, and many themes should be considered in the broader context. We should see a trend in democratization, development, economic relations and the energy market. At the same time, we should be concerned about extremism, terrorism and ethnic vendettas. What is needed are revised approaches to the developments in the Middle East. The West must revise its approach vis-à-vis the Middle East. There seems to be only one path ahead of us that could bring peace, stability and prosperity. That is the path of cooperation rather than confrontation and genuinely responding to the desires of the people rather than forcing them to accept what seems to be an artificial and superficial solution.

On the issue of Palestine, the Security Council and the world community must spare no effort to prevent the escalation of tension and confrontation in the occupied lands of Palestine. The desecration of Muslim holy places and the expansion of illegal settlements continue on an unprecedented scale. The Israeli occupying forces have continued to carry out missile air attacks and artillery bombardments of civilian areas in the Gaza Strip, in grave violation of international law, including the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. The occupying Power continues to deliberately target and kill Palestinian civilians, continuing its policy of extrajudicial executions. Moreover, no place in Gaza is safe from Israel's relentless aggression, with even playgrounds now becoming targets for Israeli warplanes.

In that connection, the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the action taken by the Non-Aligned Movement to request Switzerland, in its capacity as depositary of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, to reconvene, at the earliest opportunity, a conference of the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, for the purpose of upholding the obligations and responsibilities incumbent upon the high contracting parties in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Regarding the situation in Syria, it is clear that violence continues on various fronts. We believe that the current crisis should only be resolved through national dialogue and reconciliation and in a peaceful manner. About two weeks, ago Mr. Kofi Annan visited Iran for the second time and met Iranian senior officials. Our officials assured the Joint Special Envoy of Iran's support for his mission and expressed Iran's deep concern over the regional consequences of any violation of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. We reiterated our readiness to host talks between the Syrian Government and opposition parties.

There are numerous efforts by certain States to further complicate the situation in Syria by providing financial assistance and arms to armed groups. Sabotage, terror and violence against innocent people must be brought to an end. The countries of the region should cooperate with one another to resolve the Syrian crisis so that the final result would be to the benefit of the Syrian people, the region and the international community.

Finally, I hate to respond over and over again to the accusations by the representative of the Israeli regime, but I have to. Today the representative of the Zionist criminal regime levelled baseless allegations against my country on the issue of the recent terrorist attack in Bulgaria, as well as impugning the peaceful nature of Iran's nuclear activities. It is amazing that, only a few minutes after the terrorist attack, Israeli officials announced that Iran was responsible.

While condemning any terrorist attack in whatever form or manifestation, with regard to the terrorist attack in Bulgaria I should make it clear that we have never engaged in and will not engage in such despicable acts. Such a terrorist operation could only be planned and carried out by the same regime whose short history is full of State terrorism operations and assassinations aimed at implicating others for narrow political gains. I could provide the Council many examples showing that that regime has killed its own citizens and innocent Jewish people during the past couple of decades. As is well known, Iran is a victim of such operations by the Israeli regime, and the assassinations of Iran's nuclear scientists are fresh cases in our mind.

On the nuclear issue I should say that the Israeli regime's clandestine development and unlawful possession of hundreds of nuclear warheads and a nuclear weapons arsenal is the unique threat to the

region, as well as being a threat to international peace and security. Unless United Nations organs, including the Security Council, take meaningful steps to deal with such criminal policies and practices, hope for peace and stability in the Middle East will remain a dream to come true.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We congratulate you, Mr. President, and your country, Colombia, on presiding over the Security Council.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela endorses the statement delivered by Ambassador Mootaz Ahmadein Khalil, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Venezuela notes with concern the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Building a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in that region is now one of the most urgent challenges for the international community. Many resolutions have been adopted by the Council since 1947 on the Palestinian issue, and none of them has been complied with by the State of Israel. In fact, the political and military elite of Israel have established a new apartheid in Palestine: roads for the exclusive use of the settlers, separate policies for Palestinian settlements and villages, endorsement of the aggression of the settlers against the Palestinian population and segregationist controls and checkpoints.

The existing illegal settlements, which are promomoted by the occupying Power, are sabotaging the peace process. They constitute a grievous violation of international law and must cease immediately. Those inhuman practices are implemented by a State that, paradoxically, calls itself democratic. We express our deep concern at the tragic plight of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including children and teenagers, incarcerated by the Israeli Government without charges or a fair trial. Those prisoners are kept in inhumane conditions under the policy of administrative detention. We stand in solidarity with them and demand their immediate release.

Unfortunately, there are Powers that support these abuses, which, by all accounts, violate the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War. Venezuela has repeatedly called on the Security Council to consider, by virtue of the competencies granted to it by the Charter of the United Nations, Israel's failure to comply with its resolutions on peace and security in the Middle East, which is causing a humanitarian tragedy with dire consequences.

Israel's frequent violations of Lebanese sovereignty and occupation of the Golan are of great concern. We demand an end to its blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has been repudiated by the international community.

We reiterate the urgent need for the Council to recommend to the General Assembly the admission of Palestine as a full Member State, in reaffirmation of the international recognition that the concert of nations has granted progressively and in greater numbers to Palestine over more than two decades, and which has been rightly reflected in forums such as UNESCO. We firmly support the establishment of an independent, viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The conflict affecting the peace-loving Syrian people is painful and regrettable. The Council must unambiguously support the implementation of the six-point plan presented by Joint Special Envoy Kofi Annan, which has been welcomed by the Syrian Government. Attempts to undermine that facilitation and the peace efforts are causing grave concern. Warmongers do not want peace in Syria. Instead, they seek to bolster their geopolitical interests through regime change that, should it materialize, would destabilize the Middle East region.

Historical experience has shown that resorting to sanctions and foreign military intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign country does not settle, but instead aggravates, domestic conflict.

Venezuela emphasizes the need to promote a negotiated solution among the Syrians themselves. In that context, a ceasefire is urgently needed. It is deplorable that, rather than encourage peace and support the efforts of those sincerely seeking peace, foreign factions are inciting the most extremist factions that consider violence the only means of achieving their purposes. We reiterate that only political dialogue and diplomatic negotiations can contribute to settling the grave conflict affecting the Syrian people.

We salute those countries that, with respect to Syria, have firmly defended before the Security Council the principles of sovereignty, independence, self-determination and territorial integrity enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. We also salute those countries that are committed to peace and to promoting dialogue among the parties, and have continued to make balanced proposals to address the Syrian situation.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Hamadi (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council and your successful organization of its work, including today's meeting. I also thank Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing this morning.

Israel, the occupying Power, has continued its policy of non-compliance with all resolutions of international legitimacy and of imposing a fait accompli. One of the worst aspects of that policy has been manifested through measures taken by the Israeli authorities to Judaize Jerusalem and to obliterate the Arab and Islamic character of that holy city. In that context, we reiterate that those Israeli actions are null and void and without any legal basis. Jerusalem remains an Arab, Islamic and Christian city with mosques and churches, and there could be no Palestinian State without Jerusalem and no Jerusalem without the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Those policies of imposing a fait accompli carried out by the Israeli authorities are also manifested in the building of settlements on Palestinian territories. We were alarmed to learn of Israel's recent attempts to legitimize the outposts through the establishment of the so-called Levy Committee, which has made recommendations that run counter to international law and international legitimacy.

Two decades after the Oslo accords, Israel has continued to speak about its search for peace and to call on Palestinian leaders to resume negotiations. However, it also continues to carry out policies that run counter to all of that. How could negotiations be successful in the light of Israel's continuing settlement policies and the Security Council's ongoing inability to assume its responsibilities with regard to peace in the Middle East, or in the absence of a strong basis for the negotiations? How could they be resumed? How could they bear fruit while Israel continues to detain thousands of people and to subject them to unjust and cruel conditions? How can we speak of trust between the Palestinian and Israeli parties when Israel has maintained its strangling blockade against the Gaza Strip for the past five years?

We renew our call on the members of the Security Council, the members of the Quartet and those influential countries to pressure Israel to end its settlement policies in the occupied Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, and put an end to the blockade against the Gaza Strip. Unless those demands are met, there will be no basis for the resumption of negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. If the international community is unanimous with respect to the ultimate solution, namely, the two-State solution, then rejecting recognition of the State of Palestine is contrary to that call.

Qatar takes this opportunity to urge all Member States to assist the Palestinian State in gaining membership to the Organization in recognition of the positive contribution that this would make towards establishing a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. My delegation also reiterates that the solution to the crisis in the Middle East depends upon Israel's withdrawal from all of the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories. Israel must end all of its violations of Lebanese sovereignty, international law and resolution 1701 (2006).

The Syrian people continue to be subjected to their Government's systematic cruelty in violation of their rights. Regrettably, instead of assuming responsibility for its people, the Government has adopted a scorch-and-burn policy by using heavy artillery, attack helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, which has led some Syrians to take up arms in self-defence. The Syrian regime therefore bears full responsibility for the situation in Syria today.

The regime has not halted its terribly brutal and indiscriminate shelling of the capital and cities throughout the country, including schools, hospitals, mosques and churches. To add insult to injury, it has threatened — through a spokesperson of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs — to use chemical and bacteriological weapons. It has gone so far as to highlight its threat to use internationally prohibited weapons against Syrian villages. Those threats reflect an extremely dangerous escalation and indicate that the regime has crossed all

red lines and abnegated all responsibility. I cannot fail to mention several announcements that threaten to set fire to the entire region. The situation has become a threat to the security of the region and to the entire international community. The international community must take urgent steps to adequately confront those regional and international threats.

We recall that the International Committee of the Red Cross has announced that its criteria and definition of civil war are now applicable to the crisis in Syria. Given those extremely serious considerations, my delegation further regrets the Council's inability to effectively deal with the Syrian crisis in a manner that promotes the maintenance of international peace and security.

Consequently, Member States have been obliged to adopt various measures in order to actively address the crisis in accordance with international laws and codes of conduct. Along those lines, the Group of Arab States will request the General Assembly in New York to deal with the serious threat of the Syrian crisis. We also note that the Joint Special Envoy and his initiative will be effective only if Syria acts to ensure a transitional period that will guarantee the establishment of a democratic, pluralistic Syrian State in which all citizens are equal before the law and all rights and freedoms are respected.

History is fraught with examples of the international community's failure to bear its moral responsibility in the face of catastrophe. Today, we are all reminded of our responsibility to put an end to the bloodshed of thousands of innocent Syrians and to play a positive and constructive role in finding a solution to the crisis while maintaining the unity of the Syrian people and Syria's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, in full respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Diallo (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to condemn in the strongest possible terms the murderous 18 July bombing of a bus carrying Israeli tourists at Burgas airport in Bulgaria. That cowardly attack on innocent people provided a stark reminder of the level of commitment we must demonstrate against terrorism and its sponsors.

I would also like, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to address the Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and in particular for the outstanding manner in which you have conducted the Council's work during the month of July.

With all the acute crises and upheavals that are taking place in the region, it would be wrong to underestimate the threats posed to international peace and security by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The current situation of neither war nor peace is unsustainable. Rather than focus on conflict management, we must strengthen our efforts to seek a long-term solution.

In that respect, it is high time to return to genuine negotiations. Unfortunately, the ongoing settlement activities constitute a major obstacle on the path to peace. Moreover, the creation of a committee by the Israeli Government with the sole purpose of finding arguments to legitimize the occupation and settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory has not helped to build confidence among the parties concerned. I recall that the deliberate policy of establishing illegal settlements is inevitably accompanied by the destruction of Palestinian homes. Is it possible to truly measure the human tragedy of those who have suffered the double heartbreak of the occupation and the loss of their homes?

A negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be based on international law. The Committee calls on Israel to demonstrate its good faith by recognizing the 1967 borders, which are the basis of a peaceful settlement under resolution 242 (1967), and by adopting minimal confidence-building measures, including a halt to the illegal settlement activities and the release of Palestinian prisoners.

The Quartet should stay focused on ensuring respect for the timetable it promulgated last year. At the same time, without Palestinian reconciliation centred on the leadership of President Abbas, there will be no two-State solution. We call on all key international and regional actors to redouble their efforts in support of Palestinian unity.

The debilitating financial crisis affecting the Palestinian Authority has reached unprecedented proportions. Generous support from donors will be needed to continue to support Palestinian State-building

efforts. It is also time to take a fresh look at Palestine's application for admission to membership of the United Nations. It deserves to be evaluated on its merits, expeditiously and with an objective and open mind.

For its part, our Committee has continued to contribute constructively towards our shared goal of two States living in peace and security. The international meeting we convened in April sounded an early warning about the critical situation of Palestinian prisoners, and we are pleased to note that other entities of the United Nations system have engaged on the issue since then.

Our International Meeting on the Question of Palestine in Paris in late May, followed by the Meeting of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace in early June, focused on the role of women and youth in support of peace and on the use of social media. The sense of frustration with the current situation conveyed by participants served as a timely wake-up call that the status quo should not be taken for granted.

Our most recent Asia and Pacific Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, held in Bangkok earlier this month, focused on obstacles to achieving peace, in particular the settlements, and discussed regional strategies to ensure compliance in that context with international law. It was also felt by participants that the Security Council and the high contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention must honour their obligations. The Human Rights Council's fact-finding mission was welcomed and seen as a first step towards abiding by the principle of accountability.

In conclusion, the Committee will continue to work within the framework of its mandate to mobilize all stakeholders in the international community in order to uphold the principle of two States living side by side in peace and security and within secure and internationally recognized borders.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jerandi (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to warmly congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month, at a time when the Council has before it an agenda replete with important issues and developments. I also wish to commend your skilful stewardship of the Council's deliberations.

We are meeting today in the context of a periodic public debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Allow me to say frankly that this event has become, regrettably, a routine matter — I am tempted to say merely lip service. That is not due to insufficient importance accorded to the Palestine question, which my country considers to be undoubtedly one of the fundamental issues on the agenda of the United Nations and those of its bodies. The issue requires sustained, genuine interest on the part of all Member States until the Palestinian people regain their rights and peace is restored in the region.

The problem lies in the absence of tangible, meaningful results from those periodic meetings, as well as major, bold decisions that would make such meetings — which include high-level officials of the United Nations Secretariat — worthwhile. The Palestinian people do not need endless hours of discussion every two or three months on the Palestinian issue, at least not until the discussions produce some tangible results on the ground.

My country has therefore called for establishing a regular schedule for such meetings, as well as for new measures and mechanisms to be considered with the goal of updating and better aligning the discussions with the daily suffering and reality of the Palestinian people. The meetings should include active deliberations aimed at finalized resolutions and results to follow up the discussions.

Important, decisive events are now occurring in our region, accompanied by major challenges that have political, security and economic impacts. It is well known that the situation in the Middle East has produced repercussions on issues of international peace and security, as well as on the international economic situation. At the same time, some consider those challenges to be cause or justification for ignoring the Palestinian question, even if only temporarily. Such a pretext can obscure issues related to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including violations of every sort carried out by the Israeli occupying authorities. We consider that a colossal strategic error.

All attempts, whether deliberate or not, to undermine or put off the question of Palestine owing to tensions prevailing in the region would only further complicate the situation; whereas resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be key to bringing about lasting stability to the Middle East.

The Israeli authorities are taking advantage of current regional events in order to entrench their

oppressive colonial policy. They have continued their status quo policy of devouring ever greater tracts of Palestinian land, establishing numerous settlements and asphyxiating our Palestinian brothers and sisters everywhere — including in the holy city of Jerusalem — thereby altering Palestine's demographic, geographic and religious character. It is noteworthy that Israel, the occupying Power, is acting in that fashion at a time when it should be sending a reassuring message that the country is seriously pursuing, as indicated in its statements and decisions, its purported strategic choice of peace over its colonialist policy, which we resolutely condemn.

The era of colonialism and occupation ended decades ago. We can no longer act in the same fashion with respect to freedoms when the people of a region have cast off the domestic oppression that contributed to their economic difficulties. At the same time, the Palestinian people continue to face the same predicament and continue to fight for each and every fundamental right that every one of us holds dear. Those are the basic human rights, including the right to live in freedom and dignity, which we all defend with every fiber of our being owing to our profound respect for the principles of the Organization, which itself symbolizes the defence of the weak and the oppressed who are victims of injustice.

In that context, there is only one choice, namely, to find an immediate solution to the question of Palestine based on international consensus and aimed at establishing a just, comprehensive and lasting peace with two States living side by side in peace and security within the pre-1967 borders. At present, Israel, the occupying Power, is pursuing a policy of collective punishment. That has been recognized for decades now. It is not something that was simply made up; rather, it is rooted in a set of facts that have been documented over many years.

On 13 June, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs stated in a press release that

(*spoke in English*)

> "[t]he blockade of Gaza ... has had a devastating impact on the lives and livelihoods of the 1.6 million Palestinians who reside there."

She went on to say that

> "[t]his amounts to a collective punishment of all those living in Gaza and is a denial of basic human rights in contravention of international law."

(*spoke in Arabic*)

We owe it to ourselves, to the world and to present and future generations to not justify those acts and to not fail to resolve the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian question. We are witnessing scandalous, real violations of international law, legal instruments, norms and values of every sort. We must properly assess international relations and determine appropriate responsibilities for perpetrators and victims. How can we ignore all of those instruments? How can we struggle to decide who is the aggressor and who is the object of the aggression? We cannot allow one State to violate all of those instruments with impunity as if any State were above the rule of law.

The follow-up committee on the Arab Peace Initiative met recently in Doha to review developments on the Palestinian question. It adopted a communiqué in which it condemned the Israeli settlement policy and reasserted that the resumption of direct peace negotiations required an end to the illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The communiqué also referred to Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli jails and called for a resolution of that problem. It further called for an end to the unjust blockade of Gaza and for an investigation into the circumstances of the death of the late President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat.

These decisions and positions have prompted us to work together on the Palestinian question. Notwithstanding its political complexity, history and the conflict of external interests, it remains an issue of justice, historic rights and moral humanitarianism. The solution is not difficult; it is not impossible. The solution requires genuine will. The solution is straightforward — the Palestinian people must exercise their rights, beginning with their natural right to live in freedom and dignity and the return of their territories, allowing them to live in a State side by side with Israel in peace and security.

Then the region will enter a new era, which in turn will see the advent of a better future, not just for those two peoples, but for the world as a whole. It would prevent further tensions and frustrations that may cause us to lose any hope of achieving peace. There is thus an extremely urgent need to resolve the Palestinian question and to end this grave deadlock if the talks do not resume. We hope that the international community will be resolute in the face of ongoing Israeli violations and breaches.

We hope that the fraternal Arab peoples will recover their occupied territories. We should have a sound and serious framework without manipulation or attempts to exploit these talks for purely political purposes at the expense of the oppressed Palestinian people. We hope that this will be the first step towards the official recognition of Palestine as an independent and full Member of our Organization. That we feel is the essential element for genuine peace.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Norway.

Mr. Wetland (Norway): As members of the Council know, Norway chairs the donor support group for the Palestinian territory. We are taking the floor today to underline the serious dangers threatening the foundations of a viable Palestinian State.

First, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is facing a grave financial crisis. This is due to decline in economic growth and a reduction of donor contributions. It could push the PA into a full financial crisis within the coming months. The PA has accumulated significant debt and faces difficulties in paying salaries. Since the establishment of the PA, and in particular since the Paris Conference in 2007, the Palestinians have achieved tremendous institutional progress towards building a viable Palestinian State. Today these achievements are in jeopardy.

Secondly, peace negotiations are at an impasse. The expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank persists, in grave violation of international law. That illegal activity undermines efforts to resume peace negotiations and threatens the two-State solution. The scope and scale of settlements and the encirclement of East Jerusalem are the most severe impediments to peace. Those unlawful and unilateral acts, aiming at changing the situation on the ground and pre-empting the outcome of negotiations must stop. There is a grave risk that further expansion of the settlements could trigger waves of uncontrolled unrest in the neighbourhoods and lead to a breakdown of current security mechanisms.

When the donor support group for the Palestinian territory meets on 23 September here in New York, it will be against that backdrop. The main topic of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting will be to address the key challenges of the Palestinian economy and how to avoid an aggravated financial crisis in the short term. Immediate budgetary needs must be met as soon as possible.

But beyond that, stimulating sustainable economic growth is key. The Palestinian private sector must be allowed to develop and engage in trade internally in the Palestinian territory, as well as with its neighbours. Many restrictions on the movement of goods in and out of the West Bank and Gaza are crippling economic activity and must be lifted. Opportunities for private sector development also in Area C must be stimulated.

Norway commends those donors that have contributed to covering the PA's recurrent deficit. The European Union's front-loading of its aid was pivotal and has helped to keep the PA's budget somehow afloat. Also, recent contributions from Saudi Arabia enabled the PA to pay, albeit with a delay, full salaries prior to the holy month of Ramadan.

However, the outlook for the remainder of the budget year looks grim, unless further contributions are made. This is not the time to hold back funds and to jeopardize financial stability in the occupied Palestinian territory. Too much is at stake.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to express once again its great concern at the repeated feverish attempts of certain delegations to distract the Security Council's deliberations of the item on its agenda, the situation in the Middle East, from the main objective and reason for which it was included, namely, putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on the well-known terms of reference for peace.

Some are attempting to cover up the failure to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, due to Israeli intransigence, supported by some influential countries, by involving other issues within the discussion of the item with the intention of weakening the well-known and established terms of reference for putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, and to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian State within the borders of 4 June 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital.

That is how we understand the substance of this agenda item. Therefore, I will confine myself to the substance of the item under discussion. I will not respond to the false claims and allegations made by certain delegations against my country, Syria, at this

meeting. I will not fall into the trap, about which Syria has repeatedly warned over many years, of involving the Council in manipulations and manoeuvres that could undermine Arab-Arab relations and establish delusional fronts that can only benefit Israel and its protectors. I would like to put an observation on record — those who have most harmed the discussion of this agenda item, the situation in the Middle East, are certain Arab delegations that have consistently tried to kill the spirit of the item in a manner that benefits Israel's continued occupation of Arab territories at the expense of the legitimate rights of the Arab people.

The fact of the matter, regrettably, indicates once again that there is a systematic Israeli policy — which some would not like to subject to standards of international accountability — of violations and practices that contradict the absolute minimum of human rights principles, international humanitarian law and all moral and humanitarian standards. Israel, as we well know, continues to disregard hundreds of resolutions adopted by the United Nations since 1948 calling on the occupying Power to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories to the borders of 4 June 1967, with a view to establishing a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

The reason behind the Israeli challenge can be attributed to the absence of any serious deterrent to Israel, which benefits from the promotion of the culture of impunity and from putting itself above the law due to the direct protection provided to it by certain influential States. Those States that claim to be concerned with international law and human rights are the same States that guarantee Israel illegitimate immunity for all its crimes during decades of occupation of Arab territories. They are the same States that have provided Israel with nuclear weapons and submarines capable of launching nuclear weapons. They are the same States that have defended Israel's failure to implement the resolution on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction, adopted at the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (see NPT/CONF.1995/32 (Part I), Annex).

In that context, the Security Council regrettably has not been able to rise up to its responsibilities in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. No progress has been achieved in that regard. On the contrary, the situation has deteriorated since the United Nations has become a disabled second fiddle to the international Quartet with regard to the continued escalation of aggression by Israel and the uncontrolled and unprecedented settler activity, political intransigence and preparation for new aggression in the coming days. The Israeli escalation enjoys the political, military and unlimited financial and media support of certain influential States that are originally responsible for all the tensions and conflicts in our region.

It may be useful to recall here that just yesterday, in Brussels, the European Union entered into around 60 new agreements of cooperation with Israel, in spite of Israel's violations of human rights and its policies of aggression and settlement activity contravening international law. Nevertheless, this morning we have listened to the statements made by some colleagues, ambassadors of European countries, in which they spoke of the fact that the Palestinian State is now being called Area C in the deliberations of the Council. Later on, it will become Street A, B and C and not Area C. Area C would be the Palestinian State. The Palestinian State is no longer there.

Israel continues to refuse to return the occupied Syrian Golan to its motherland, Syria, in flagrant violation of resolution 497 (1981), which declares Israel's annexation of the Syrian Golan null and void and without legal basis. Israel also pursues its settler policies, its State terrorism and the exercise of policies of discrimination and oppression against the Syrian inhabitants of the Golan. It continues to dismember the Golan, build the separation wall and establish the segregationist isolation of the Golan east of the occupied Majd al-Shams village.

We have informed the Secretary-General and the members of the Security Council of all of those violations; we sent our most recent official communication on 17 July. However, and most regrettably, our complaints have fallen on deaf ears. Not only did the representatives of the Secretariat not address those serious Israeli violations in their monthly media briefings to the Security Council under the agenda item "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question", but they also did not refer to the Syrian Golan at all, including the threat made by the Israeli Minister of Defence two days ago that the Golan is a candidate for aggression and the potential trigger of a full-scale war that would actually backfire against Israel itself.

That approach by the representatives of the Secretariat, which is repeatedly and blatantly collusive,

represents a clear violation of the Secretariat's duties to brief the members of the Security Council on these and related developments in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981). The simplest lesson that we can draw from all of this is that this approach has encouraged Israel to maintain its policies of aggression and occupation and to keep the truth from the members of the Security Council and the United Nations.

There is another point that I would like to make clear at this juncture concerning the reckless attempts of certain countries to harm brotherly relations between Lebanon and Syria. Violations of Syrian sovereignty by armed terrorist groups from Lebanese territory have recently increased. I have with me an official list of 114 cases of weapons smuggling from Lebanese into Syrian territory; there is none in the opposite direction. Those 114 cases are only the ones we know about, and they all took place within a period of only two months, from 1 May to 24 July.

In that context, we do not need to stress the strong bilateral Lebanese and Syrian ties, and we welcome the measures taken by the Lebanese authorities in charge of monitoring the common borders to prevent arms smuggling to Syria and to stop all terrorists. However, the problem lies in the actions taken not by the Lebanese Government but by certain political parties in Lebanon that finance, shelter and support those armed groups and help them to smuggle weapons from Lebanon to Syria to carry out terrorist operations that would prolong the bloodshed and the conflict among innocent civilians and members of the military. Those actions enjoy the direct intelligence, military, media and financial support of Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries, such as the United States and France, which provide these armed groups with sophisticated equipment.

Meanwhile, they claim that the equipment is non-lethal, when in fact it is being used to facilitate terrorist operations in Syria, costing the lives of thousands of innocent Syrians, civilian and military alike. We have provided the Secretariat and the members of the Council with scores of documents and evidence about armed incursions into Syria originating in Lebanon and other neighbouring States. That reality has been confirmed by the international media, including through video and audio evidence, most recently in an article in today's New York Times. However, the representative of the Secretariat failed to mention any of these facts in his briefing, to the great detriment of the Secretariat's credibility.

In conclusion, the representatives of Qatar and Saudi Arabia shed crocodile tears over the suffering of the Syrian people. The Syrian blood being spilled hourly by the Qatari-Saudi collusion — through direct military, financial, diplomatic and political interference and the media — should suffice in the eyes of any observer to contradict the outrageous claims made on the Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya satellite channels and by the officials of those two countries, to which Syria has never done any harm. That coverage and those statements clearly unmask the political approach of the politicians of those two countries. Qatari and Saudi foreign policy should have supported the Kofi Annan plan and the Geneva document, instead of conspiring to undermine both while escalating their attacks on Syria and its interests in the General Assembly, having failed to do so in the Security Council.

The Syrian people will find their own wellspring, free of the petro-dollar spigot, Wahhabist-Salafist forces and Western hegemony over their political fate and options. I call on the Governments of Qatar and Saudi Arabia to immediately respond to the demands of their own people and to their internal and external oppositions. Saudi civilians have suffered greatly from oppression by the military and security forces in Al-Qatif and Al-Awamiya. More than 250 Qatari opposition figures — some of them members of the ruling family — have made legitimate demands for reform and for an end to the squandering of the Qatari people's money and resources on attacks and conspiracies against other Arab and Islamic peoples. Qatar and Saudi Arabia are no example for anyone to follow when it comes to democracy.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's important debate at this critical time. The Sri Lankan delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The year 2012 has so far turned out to be a year of political stagnation for the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, unfortunately overshadowed by momentous international and regional developments. Even though the objective of a comprehensive peace in the region continues to be elusive, we must not give up on the

peace process. We are here in this Chamber not to pay lip service but to ensure that the world does not forget the plight of the Palestinians, as well as to urge both parties to the Palestinian issue to commit to a peaceful settlement. Hope endures if intentions and efforts are true.

The United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories recently concluded its fact-finding mission to Jordan, Egypt and Gaza. As the Chair of the Special Committee, I will present the mission report to the General Assembly in November, with its observations and recommendations on improving the human rights situation in the occupied territories. There are essential steps that need to be taken to improve the situation on the ground, as well as for confidence-building. In the meantime, let me state that, in the light of the testimony received by the Committee, the situation on the ground, especially in Gaza, is unsustainable.

The blockade of Gaza, although marginally alleviated recently, is having a devastating effect on ordinary people, particularly the young. Approximately 80 per cent of families in Gaza are dependent on humanitarian aid from the United Nations for their survival. Prospects for long-term economic growth are meagre, given the stifling restrictions on imports and exports. Having to rely on illegal smuggling through 100 tunnels, essentially due to the blockade, is among the indignities experienced by the Gaza Palestinians. That is worrying, as the economic sustainability of the Gaza Palestinians would be an essential component of any peace plan, and the blockade is denying them any possibility of developing their economy. We urge Israel to lift its restrictions within the framework of resolution 1860 (2009).

Israel's illegal settlement activity is contrary to international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the International Court of Justice advisory opinion, as well as being contrary to Israel's commitments under the Road Map. World opinion has called for a cessation of settlement activity. That call must be heeded. At the meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People held on 16 May, we heard of the unfortunate developments that continue to take place in the Jordan Valley, displacing many Palestinian families and destroying their livelihoods. The Bedouin are particularly affected.

We reiterate that the international legal framework is the final guarantor of our rights. It protects all of us. The marginalization and oppression of Palestinians in their own land creates a charged environment. The mass imprisonment of Palestinians, including children, and the routine demolition of houses, which continues unabated, are unacceptable. Such actions are eroding the prospects for a two-State solution and sap away necessary confidence. Israel is obliged by international humanitarian law to protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories. Violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians has become more commonplace. We also note that the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel and indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians will only further widen the gap between the parties.

Against this background, there is an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations, as the Middle East Quartet has continued to stress. The political unity and economic advancement of the Palestinian people will contribute to the viability of the two-State solution. Palestinian internal reconciliation efforts must continue, and regional support is vital. Therefore, we urge leaders on all sides, as well as regional leaders, to infuse renewed vigour into the peace process. Sri Lanka also supports the implementation of the General Assembly's resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. We hope that the State of Palestine will soon be able to take its rightful place among the Members of the United Nations and that peace, dignity and security will be restored to all parties.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba wholeheartedly endorses the statement made by the Ambassador of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

At various times of the year, the Security Council resumes this cyclical debate on the Middle East, but the problems persist or, worse still, deteriorate. The situation in the Middle East remains deplorable. Israel's ongoing occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab territories is the main obstacle to achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive solution in the region.

Palestinian families suffer the consequences of the Israeli occupation. Each year, the relevant agencies

of the United Nations receive reports of flagrant violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people, including children, women and the elderly. Recently, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories reported that, in the course of this year, the Israeli authorities have demolished more than 330 structures, and that half of the 536 Palestinians displaced in 2012 are children. This situation is unacceptable. Thousands of Palestinian political prisoners remain in jail, victims of the arbitrary actions of the Israeli authorities. Several have gone on hunger strike in order to denounce the exactions and injustice inflicted upon them.

None of these facts generates headlines or campaigns in the major international press, nor are they presented to the Council by members that encourage wars and occupations against countries of the South, giving no thought to the consequences of their actions for the very civilians whom they claim to protect. The Security Council must play its due role in defence of international peace and security by adopting concrete, practical measures to ensure that Israel ends its abuses against the Palestinian people.

Israel's conduct deliberately flouts the resolutions of the United Nations and international law. It poses a threat to regional and international peace and security, and violates the human rights of an entire people with flagrant, systematic and inhuman abuses that this organ should condemn. Israel must immediately withdraw its illegal presence in the Palestinian territories it occupies, ignoring the demands of the international community. It must cease the construction of settlements in occupied Palestine. It should end its attacks and indiscriminate use of military force against Palestinian civilians, and unconditionally and fully lift its cruel and illegal blockade of Gaza.

Cuba reiterates its support for Palestine's request for admission as a full State Member of the United Nations. That request has so far come to naught because of the threat of a veto from one permanent member of the Security Council, despite the fact that the State of Palestine already enjoys the recognition of more than 130 countries in all regions of the world. The Security Council must without further delay take a positive stand on this issue, in accordance with the manifest wish of the overwhelming majority of the States Members of the Organization.

The complicit silence of some Powers on the Council perpetuates the current state of impunity enjoyed by the Israeli Government. Cuba reaffirms its rejection of the illegal construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Syrian Golan since 1967, which violate international law and the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations.

Cuba reaffirms its position in support of a just and lasting peace for all the peoples of the Middle East that would end Israel's occupation of all Arab territories and guarantee the exercise of the self-determination of the Palestinian people through the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Cuba is closely monitoring the situation concerning Syria and its international repercussions, aware that the information available is disparate, imprecise and frequently manipulated. We are alarmed by the appeals of those who champion regime change in Syria and advocate the use of force and violence, rather than contributing to dialogue and negotiation among all the parties. Cuba reaffirms its rejection of policies of interference and destabilization in Syria aimed at imposing regime change.

The Security Council was not conceived as and cannot act as an instrument for triggering regime change in any country. Its obligation is to promote peace, not violence; it is to avoid destabilization and protect the innocent, not to exploit and manipulate them for geopolitical ends. These are also the responsibilities of the United Nations as a whole. We support the endeavours under way to achieve a peaceful settlement of the situation in that country, in full respect for its sovereign rights. The Security Council should unanimously direct its efforts to that end.

Cuba shares the concern over the loss of innocent life in Syria and elsewhere. At the same time, we reiterate our categorical rejection of any form of external interference, direct and indirect alike, including logistical support for irregular armed groups. An intervention by external forces in Syria would have grave consequences for international peace and security, especially in the Middle East. Taking into account the experience of and precedents set by recent cases, in which clear manipulation of the United Nations Charter, double standards and flagrant violations of international law have been in evidence, we reaffirm our rejection of any attempt to undermine Syria's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The role of the international community, at this time of difficulty for one Member State, is to help safeguard

peace and stability in that country. We reiterate our confidence in the ability of the Syrian people and Government to resolve their own internal problems without external interference. We demand full respect for the free self-determination and sovereignty of that Arab country.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of the Maldives.

Mr. Sareer (Maldives): The Maldives congratulates Colombia on having assumed the presidency of the Security Council, and commends the work it has completed to date. We further thank Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert Serry, for his briefing.

One year ago, in an open debate on this very same topic, the Maldives called for peace in Syria, for settlement activity in the occupied territories to cease, and for the recognition of the sovereign and independent Palestinian State. It is unfortunate to note again today that the international community has been unable to make any meaningful progress on these issues.

Every day we hear tragic news of the number of deaths in Syria. We hear the stories of the many atrocities committed. Many more thousands of people are being displaced as a result of the ongoing violence. That is precisely the reason that the issue is not a domestic one, but one that calls for an internationally led remedy. It is now clear that, with the increasing number of incidents occurring along the border with Lebanon, the violence in Syria is bound to destabilize the entire region.

The Maldives applauds the efforts of Mr. Kofi Annan, Join Special Envoy of the League of Arab States and the United Nations, as well as those of the United Nations Supervision Mission. Yet, regrettably, the United Nations is seen as helpless in giving hope to the people of Syria, who are paying the price of the conflict. It is our hope that the Security Council can come up with an effective response to address the need of the hour, before the situation spins out of control. In this, the holiest month of the Islamic calendar, we pray for a way forward. Let peace find its way.

Trying to find peace in the Middle East has become the quest of our generation. Yet, it is also increasingly clear that the possibility for a two-State solution is diminishing the longer that the peace process is stalled. As Special Coordinator Serry emphasized, the continued Israeli settlement activity is transforming the very demographics of the two nations into one that is inherently Israeli. The Maldives believes that the single most important issue concerning peace in the Middle East is the recognition of Palestine as an independent sovereign State. We do not believe that there can be a meaningful dialogue without the acceptance of statehood.

My delegation fails to understand how the peace process in the Middle East could continue while it is absolutely undermined by the existence of an unequal power relationship. While that dynamic will not change until real peace is established, we as the United Nations have an obligation to level the playing field. We have an obligation to ensure that all elected Governments have the representation that is equal to the mandate given to them by their people.

The Maldives believes that Palestine has a Government that is capable of administering its affairs, and an administration that is ready to take on the full burden of governance. The only way forward, therefore, is through international recognition of Palestine as a State, with a view to Palestinians negotiating their own interests and concentrating on developing their own social and economic infrastructure, while being at peace with the State of Israel.

After six decades of inaction, it is time to move forward. The Maldives calls on the international community, and especially the members of the Council, to support three generations of Palestinians who have lived their lives under the yoke of occupation. The United Nations has an obligation to protect the full enjoyment of rights of the Palestinian people by supporting a free and independent Palestinian State.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. The Security Council has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.